

**The Six Party Talks and
North Korea's Wish List
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Finally, the Six Party Talks have resume after a tense year of intense diplomacy. The time was not wasted. No major progress was made toward a diplomatic resolution of the Korea Peninsula's many problems. But all the nations, including North Korea, have demonstrated the sincerity of their promise to achieve a peaceful diplomatic solution. This is good for everyone, especially the participating nations in the Six Party Talks. The continuation of peace and stability in Northeast Asia will allow the participants to perpetuate their prosperity and dynamic economic activity.

Over the past year, the delay compelled North Korea to clarify more precisely what it hopes to accomplish in these talks. This is a vital first step toward a diplomatic solution. We do not have to agree with what North Korea wants, but at least we finally know what its demands are.

North Korea's foremost priority is survival. All governments share this universal desire. The Bush Administration has finally recognized North Korea as a sovereign, independent state and has repeatedly proclaimed over the past year that it has no intention of attacking North Korea. Although Secretary of State Rice has made numerous such public pledges, Pyongyang insisted that a ranking representative of the Bush Administration state them in a face to face meeting with a ranking North Korea official. US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill did this in his recent dinner in Beijing with North Korean Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Gye Kwan.

United States hostility toward North Korea, in Pyongyang's eyes, is the most formidable impediment to a peaceful diplomatic solution. Instead of security assurances, Pyongyang demands that the Bush Administration shift from its current "hostile" policy to one intent upon peaceful co-existence. As evidence of Washington's sincerity, Pyongyang wants the United States to:

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- Stop "slandering" North Korea's leader and its political system,
- remove all economic sanctions and disband the Proliferation Security Initiative,
- drop North Korea from the terrorism list,
- normalize diplomatic and commercial relations,
- abrogate the North Korea Human Rights Law which the US Congress passed in 2004, and
- eventually replace the Korean War Armistice with a peace treaty that provides for the withdrawal of all US military forces in South Korea.

Then there is the complex matter of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, which consists of nuclear bombs, ballistic missiles and chemical and biological weapons. North Korea insists that it must keep its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles as a "deterrence capability" to defend itself from the United States. Pyongyang denies that it has chemical and biological weapons, a claim that the United States rejects.

North Korea maintains that because of the United States' hostile policy toward it, Pyongyang must reject Washington's June 2004 proposal. In that proposal, the United States demands the "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all of North Korea's nuclear programs, both military and civilian. Instead, North Korea has called for "reward for freeze." This means that North Korea wants economic compensation for its agreement to halt its nuclear programs.

South Korea hoped to induce North Korea to agree to freeze its nuclear programs by offering to supply North Korea 2 million kilowatts of electricity. But Seoul went a step further. It wants Pyongyang to agree not just to freeze, but to also ultimately dismantle its nuclear programs. But North Korea is unlikely to accept Seoul's offer. Pyongyang has said it would freeze its military related nuclear programs, but not its civilian nuclear reactor construction program. Also, North Korea's electric power grid is so old (it was built during the Japanese colonial period) that it cannot accept a huge influx of electricity from South Korea. Additionally, North Korea is probably reluctant to become dependent on electricity from South Korea. In the event that relations between the two Koreas worsen, North Korea could lose half its electricity.

North Korea's solution for the Korean Peninsula's nuclear problem is almost exactly the opposite of Washington's proposal. Washington insists that North Korea first give up its entire nuclear weapons program plus its ballistic missiles and then the United States will begin to normalize relations with Pyongyang. Pyongyang rejects this, saying this would be unilateral surrender. Instead, Pyongyang wants "disarmament" talks. This means that it would be willing to phase out its weapons of mass destruction in a "step by step," "words or words," and "actions for action" process. This is merely North Korea's way of demanding that the United States agree to reciprocal disarmament. In other words, as North Korea dismantles its nuclear and ballistic arsenals, it would expect the United States to withdraw similar weapons from Northeast Asia.

Obviously, none of this is likely to happen soon. On the contrary, everyone should anticipate a lengthy and complex series of negotiations. But at least both sides, and all of North Korea's neighbors, agree that patience diplomacy is preferable to war. Next time we will examine the United States proposal and its changing strategy for dealing with North Korea.